

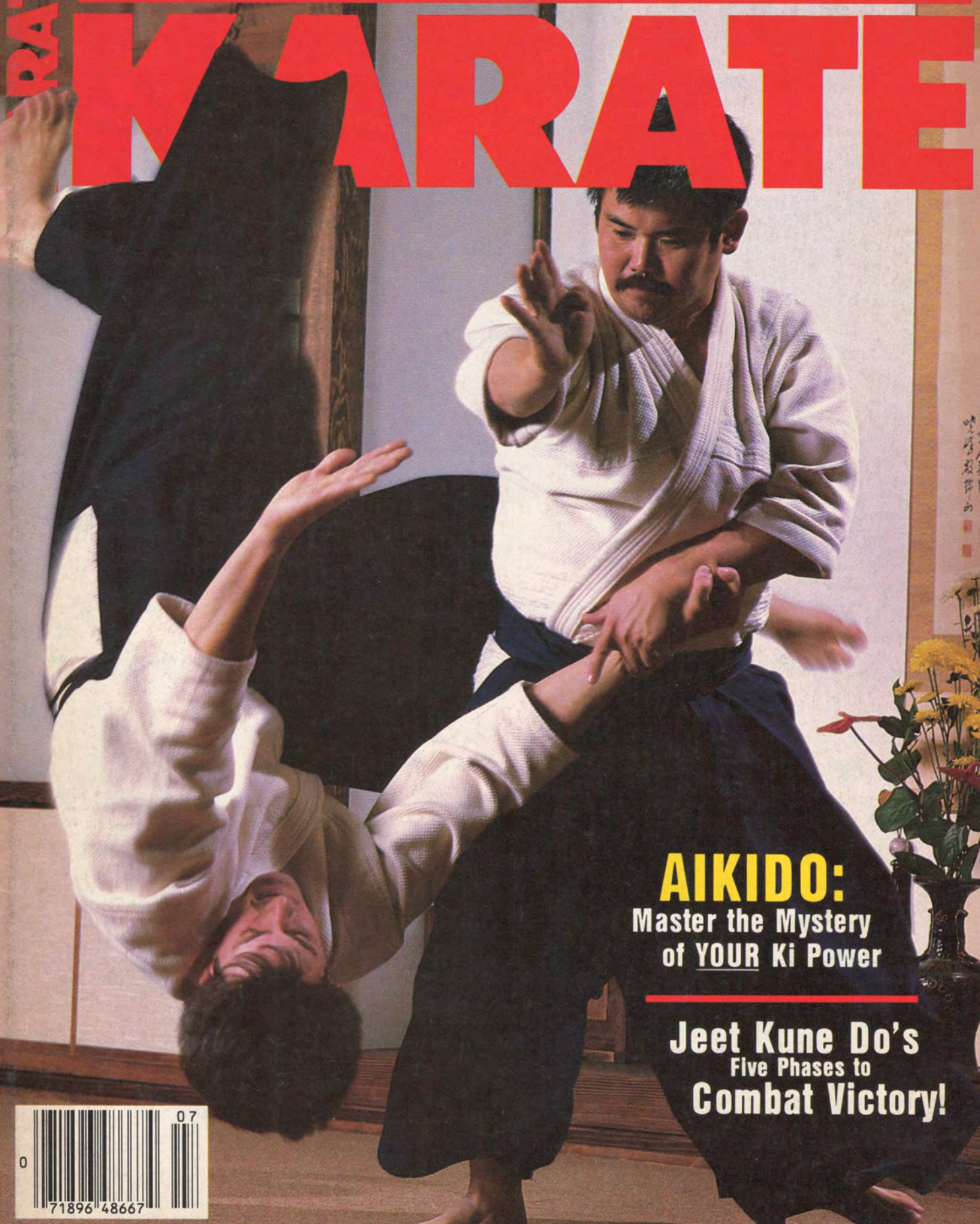
The Legendary Joe Lewis Reveals Bruce Lee's Secret Fighting Method!

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AIKIDO:

Master the Mystery
of YOUR Ki Power

Jeet Kune Do's
Five Phases to
Combat Victory!



By Mark Shuper
KI POWER

The Way of Aikido

Breathing in Unison with the Universe



The miraculous transcends the power of speech and is where the workings of the mind are defeated. Thus, in the art of the *Nō*, before the *yūgen* of a master, all praise fails, admiration transcends the comprehension of the mind, and all attempts at classification and grading fail. The art which excites such a reaction on the part of the audience may be called the flower of the miraculous.

—Seami (1363-1443), “The Nine Stages of the *Nō* in Order”

The school is located in the midst of an industrial maze of factories and warehouses. Lying on the edge of Los Angeles' Little Tokyo district, the old red brick warehouse at 940 East Second St. seems an unlikely home for a traditional school of martial art—particularly once the gray pall of a Los Angeles summer has set in. But once through the doors of loft number seven, one is acutely conscious of having left Los Angeles and the industrial surroundings behind—and of having stepped into another world.

For the Aikido Institute of Los Angeles is truly a *dojo*—a sacred place of the Way that not only offers training in a traditional Japanese martial art, but exposure to the culture that nurtured the art as well. With the exception of the Olympic-grade floor mat, the *dojo* resounds with quiet tradition. A suit of Japanese armor graces one corner of the practice area. The *tokonoma*, the traditional alcove, is an exquisite study of delicacy and strength; a spray of iris provides a splash of blue; a portrait of Ueshiba Morihei, the legendary

O-sensei, founder of aikido, peers from beneath a bamboo screen.

Indeed, when the Aikido Institute of Los Angeles first opened its doors in the spring of 1984, it created a great stir among architectural designers and critics. A long-envisioned labor of love on the part of chief instructor Daniel Furuya, the *dojo* and attendant quarters are studies in traditional Japanese carpentry. The architectural critic of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* hailed the *dojo* as the finest example of 16th century Kyoto style woodwork to be found in the United States.

Furuya, who holds the rank of *yondan* in aikido, is a recognized authority on East Asian cultures. In 1969, Furuya journeyed to Japan, having been invited to study at the aikido *hombu dojo* in Tokyo by Morihei Ueshiba. Ueshiba died shortly after issuing the invitation, and Furuya studied the art under the tutelage of the master's son and successor, Ueshiba Kisshomaru, the current *Doshu* (headmaster) of the aikido *hombu dojo* and the International Aikido Federation.





Way of Aikido . . .

"The dojo is a labor of love," Furuya quietly explains in the second story apartments that house a kitchen, changing rooms, and showers. "It is a small down payment on the debt I owe to the Doshu for teaching me. It is also a gift to my students, a place where they may always come to study the art. It is both a gift to Doshu and a gift to them."

The Way of Harmonizing Ki

Aikido is the creation of Morihei Ueshiba, one of the 20th century's most celebrated martial masters—and mystics. The style is commonly described as a "soft" system that uses "circular" techniques such as joint locks, joint manipulations, and throws. Aikido is also commonly called an "esoteric" system because of the art's complex philosophy. The trainee is taught to "blend" with his opponent, to enter into the opponent's aggressive energy and turn it against him. This the elder Ueshiba described in terms that sound strange to many Western ears, terms like harmony and love; indeed, aikido philosophy can be quickly—if not completely—summarized as the unification of mind and body coupled with spiritual harmony and universal love. It is not a philosophy that most expect to discover as the core principle of a martial art.

Ueshiba Morihei wrote of his lifelong devotion to, and insights into, martial arts study, "When I grasped the real nature of the universe through *budo*, I saw clearly that human beings must unite mind and body and the *ki* that connects the two and then achieve harmony with the activity of all things in the universe." Ueshiba explained universal *ki* as the life force of the universe; individual *ki*, individual life energy, resided in a person's breath power. In the Chinese Taoist classics *Tao Te Ching (The Way and Its Power)* and the *Chuang Tzu*, the sage, or natural man, is



"If you think about what you're doing as opposed to feeling the opponent's *ki* and reacting to it, you'll always be a second behind," Furuya explains to a student practicing defense against a knife attack. "You never want to be a second behind the opponent—particularly when he's wielding a knife."

described as "breathing from his heels." Aikido was a vehicle, a system of training—physical *and* mental—that strove to unite and harmonize these two fields of energy.

Such a philosophy, combined with techniques that appear graceful and effortless when performed by a skilled practitioner, has led to certain misconceptions about the art on the part of outside observers. Critics claim that aikido is "choreographed," that students must throw themselves into their partner's technique; that the style is simply unrealistic in terms of self-defense and should be thought of only as a form of "spiritual dancing." On the other hand, many prospective students enter into study with their attention focused strictly on aikido philosophy and esoteric notions of *ki* power, on the notions of pacifism, love, and non-resistance implied by the principles of the art, overlooking the fact that the philosophy is part of a process that includes severe physical training and discipline—*shugyo* in terms of classical Japanese martial art.

Yet to step into the environs of the Aikido Institute of Los Angeles on a quiet Saturday morning when Daniel Furuya is working with a small group of advanced students is to realize the misguided nature of both those perspectives. This morning's training concentrates on a knife defense: the aggressor attacks the defender with a wooden *tanto*, an

exact replica of the Japanese dagger. The defender's response is a smooth body shift outside of the line of attack, followed by seizure of the attacker's knife hand. The hand and arm are brought back in a circular technique that leads the attacker into a nasty throw. Training is deadly serious, and Furuya pays a great deal of attention to the execution of a technique and its full implications.

"No, no," he mutters with a slightly disgusted shake of his head to one "attacking" student. "You're much too obvious in your attack. Remember, you're holding a dagger, you intend to kill. Don't telegraph your move, don't make it easy for the enemy to read your intention."

Furuya turns his attention to the student's partner who is acting as the defender. "The point is to *feel* the enemy, to feel his body before he commits himself to the attack. You must extend your sensitivity to the enemy and discern his intention. You're *thinking*. 'Oh,' you say to yourself, 'I see a knife coming. I'd better step here, and then step there.' If you think about what you're doing as opposed to feeling the opponent's *ki* and reacting to it, you'll always be a second behind. You do not want to be a second behind the opponent—particularly when he is wielding a knife."

The lesson continues, and for anyone convinced that aikido is strictly esoteric meditation, the lesson is an eye opener. "In shifting," Furuya cautions his pupils, "you want to place yourself properly. Your body



should be positioned behind the opponent's shoulder. If you don't shift back far enough, you are still in range—a simple twist of the knife and you are cut." Furuya then moves on to executing the encounter, seizing the knife hand and whipping it back in a circular motion that leads the opponent into a throw.

"Look where you're grabbing," he lectures all present. "Do not grab at the wrist. Your hand can easily slip down the blade. Now you're cut and the opponent is free. Grip below the elbow and let your hand slide down the forearm where it is stopped by the wrist.

"No, no," he patiently explains to another member of the group executing the counter throw. "Look how you are bringing the opponent's arm back. The blade passes right before your face. You're unprotected." Furuya assumes the motion of the attacker, and when the student brings his knife arm back, Furuya shifts slightly—and the tip of the wooden tanto is resting in the hollow of the student's throat. "Remember," he addresses the class quietly. "This is serious training—this life and death. Protecting yourself means leaving no openings for the enemy."

And thus the morning wears into the early afternoon. The visitor observes the practical and serious nature of training for a form of close quarter combat, a martial art whose techniques require psychological awareness, sensitivity—and to be mystical, extension of individual ki, individual energy, to function properly.

The Aikido Process

"It's true that many people bear misconceptions about aikido," Furuya observes later in the dojo. "Many students come attracted to the beauty of aikido philosophy. They are not that aware of the physical nature of training. Of course, aikido philosophy is beautiful. I believe the reason for aikido's growth on an international scale is because aikido fulfills certain basic human needs—needs that are spiritual and psychological. But one cannot deny or ignore the physical discipline.

"Another misconception concerning aikido is that it's easy. The techniques look effortless. People will come observe a class—I encourage visitors at the dojo. After watching one class they'll often sign up for lessons. Then they get out on the mat for the first time. Suddenly they realize that aikido is not easy, that it is physically demanding, that one one hour class will leave them utterly exhausted.

"For example, I had a student last summer who was a candidate for the US Olympic team. His brother was studying at the institute. After watching his brother's class, he decided to study the art. Despite the fact that he considered himself in excellent shape, classes left him feeling weak and tired. He was in good condition, but aikido's emphasis on leg strength and movement, hip stability, and so on left him exhausted. Unfortunately, he decided not to continue training."

While aikido's popularity has swelled internationally, it remains one of the less com-

mon—and less visible—martial arts in America. Part of the reason lies in the explosive popularity of arts like karate and taekwondo; another explanation lies in the physical demands made by the art and the complexity of its techniques. A third explanation must also be acknowledged: the expectations of practitioners, which tend to be goal-oriented are at odds with the *process* of training.

"Aikido unites mind and body," Furuya explains. "The process of training accomplishes this by destroying certain concepts. Training takes one past assumed limits, limits again that are both physical and mental. Through training and overcoming these limitations, one reaches a state where mind and body act as one. This involves great discipline and determination.

"This type of training lies at odds with certain Western concepts. For example, one of the first concepts aikido destroys is that of accomplishment—the belief that by training for this long in the art, one reaches this level, that training is directed to attainment of a specific object or state of being—"mastery," for example.

"That is a particularly Western belief. One invests so much effort for so much return. At its extreme, as in some forms of capitalism, this leads to the belief in maximum return for minimum effort.

"That outlook is completely opposed to the philosophy of martial arts, which is maximum effort for minimum result or return. Thus, a student might pose the question: 'How many years of training does it take to acquire proficiency in aikido?' This question has no relation to aikido training.

"Rather," Furuya expounds, "training, practice is *everything*: Practice is mastery; mastery is practice. The same holds true of *zazen* (sitting zen) meditation: meditation is enlightenment; enlightenment is meditation. The idea that one trains or meditates to achieve an object or a state of being is an *illusion*. The process—the act of practice or the act of



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Way of Aikido . . .

meditation—is the goal. This philosophy lies behind the aphorism of the master and the white belt being One.”

The Philosophical Roots of Aikido

“This dojo actually serves two purposes,” Daniel Furuya explains. “First, it is a place for training. Second, I hope it serves as a *cultural* property that expands the awareness of students beyond aikido to Japanese culture and the East Asian philosophies that shaped that culture.

“Of course, many martial artists are aware of the great influence Zen in particular, and Buddhism in general, exerted on Japanese martial art. Aikido contains a great deal of Zen philosophy; it also draws on Confucian doctrine and Shinto, the native religious philosophy of Japan.”

In Furuya's learned view, the transformation of Japanese martial art from systems of pure combat to methods of self-knowledge and “spiritual forging” received its impetus from the era of peace that began with the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate. At that time, the arts of the scholar were identified with study of martial art on a wide scale—pen and sword were one, wrote Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa shogun, in his “Instructions to the Military Households.”

“This fusion of scholasticism and Buddhism's close identification with martial art were a product of the prevailing neo-Confucianism of the time,” Furuya adds in an aside. “Many individuals consider Buddhism and Confucianism to be opposing philosophies, but Buddhist priests introduced Confucian doctrine to Japan. The society of the Tokugawa period, following the violence of the “Era of Warring States,” a period of civil war that lasted over a century, was based on Chu Hsi philosophy—a new-Confucian social

doctrine created by Chu Hsi during the Chinese Sung dynasty.”

One of the major events marking the marriage of Zen and martial art is the treatise written by Takuan, a Zen abbot, for and to Yagyu Munenori Tajima no Kami, the founder of the Yagyu Shinkage Ryu. Takuan wrote in “The True and Wondrous Sword of Tai-a” that a miraculous transformation had taken place: the sword of annihilation (*satsujin ken*) had become the sword of preservation (*katsujin ken*), the blade that fosters and protects life.

Yagyu Munenori himself, in his *Heiho Kadensho* (*Household Transmission of the Fighting Arts*), incorporated many similar Buddhist teachings into his ryu. These works mark the beginning of the great shift in martial art from arts of killing to arts of spiritual forging.

“Of course, the philosophical insights of the warrior class, and their adoption of Zen, also stems from the fact that they trained in killing techniques relentlessly. One was prepared to kill—or be killed—at any moment. Add to that training the turbulent decades of civil war that forged the warrior class, and the emergence of martial art philosophy is not that remarkable.

“One simply had to live completely in the moment. Body and mind had to be one, without the interfering screen of consciousness. This was basic necessity for the warrior. Out of the demands of warriorship comes

this seemingly esoteric philosophy, and this kinship to Zen.

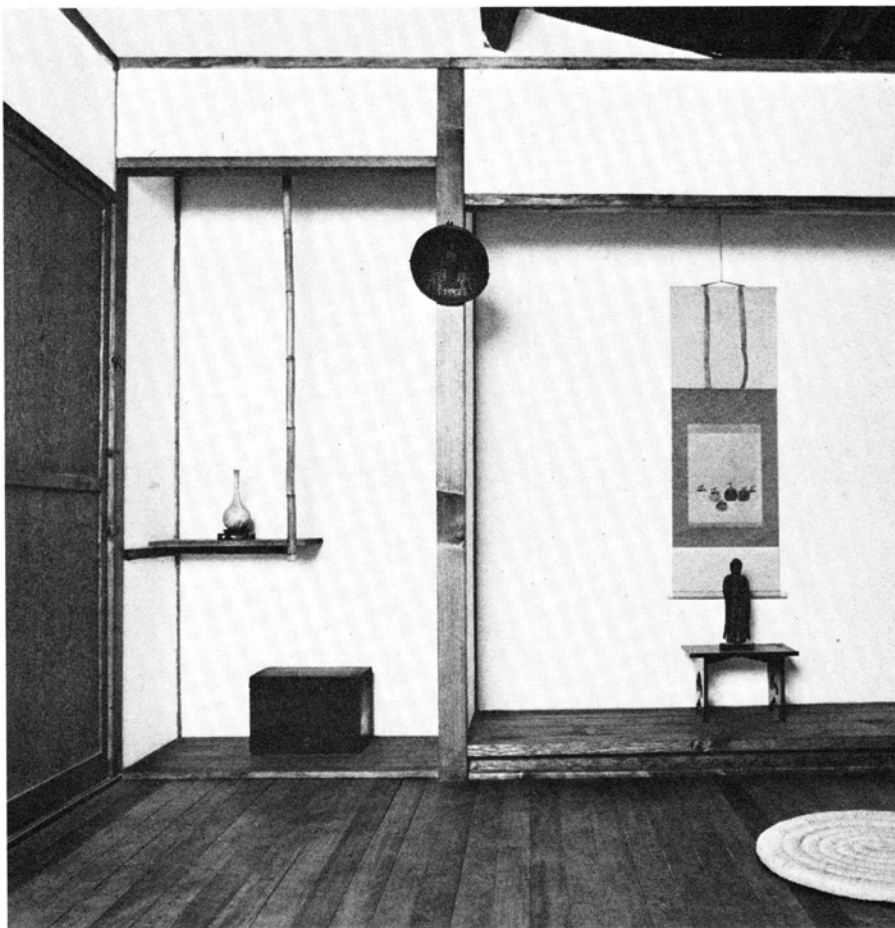
“The same holds true of aikido: one trains with such intensity, all-out, to reach that state of awareness, the “nowness” of living totally in the present. Training must be severe, must require discipline, must be all or nothing, life or death.

“One can explain this concept. One can come to an intellectual understanding of the principle. But in the end, it must be experienced, it must be lived fully. This holds true in traditional teaching methods as well: Yes, I can explain a technique, an approach; yes, the student can grasp it with his *mind*. But understanding, or the free expression of one's self through aikido, must be directly experienced through physical discipline.”

Shinto is another of the three legs on which aikido's heritage rests. Nowhere is this point more clearly made than in the photographs of Ueshiba Morihei taken during his later years of retreat in the countryside at Iwama. There the Founder, rising early in the morning for meditation and practice, was keenly attuned to nature. Pictures of O-sensei show him touching trees in a state of wonder, or watering the myriad plants that surrounded his dwelling—mute testimonials to his vibrant attachment to, and harmony with the natural world.

“The love of nature, of life's processes, the delight in the expression of nature's rhythms, is very much Shinto, and very Japanese,” Furuya explains. “The Founder believed that aikido was a natural expression of our existence—a free expression of our life force and

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a way towards harmony with nature. Being a deeply philosophical and religious man, O-sensei found a great deal of peace, enlightenment and contentment in the countryside, which firmly shaped aikido practice and his philosophy."

The third leg of aikido's philosophical triad is Confucian thought. "The Founder, when he retired to the countryside at the outbreak of the Second World War, essentially lived the life of a Confucian gentleman-scholar. He would rise in the morning, and his day would be filled with practice, farming, and contemplation. The Founder always maintained that understanding farming was central to understanding aikido. Farming, his direct connection with the natural rhythm of the earth, was a key factor in the development of O-sensei's philosophy of aikido—as were the Confucian principles of humanity, righteousness and love."

"Of course," Furuya continues, "aikido is a living art. It underwent many changes during its development. Stories abound of the early days, of the "Hell dojo" and the severity of the training. But the Founder's course was a spiritual one, and by the time of his retirement to Iwama, aikido was assuming its present form.

"I would like to add that aikido in the Postwar period has greatly been shaped by the Doshu, by Ueshiba Kisshomaru. The Founder was the source of inspiration, and his philosophy and his presence were and are the guiding lights of aikido. But I also feel that not enough credit is given to Doshu for his great labors in formalizing aikido and

continuing the growth of the art along the lines that the Founder envisioned."

Aikido and the Spiritual Premise

"I mentioned earlier that aikido—that martial art—fulfills basic human spiritual and psychological needs. I think that was true of martial arts training in 11th century Japan; I believe that is true today—even more so. I also believe that this has attributed to aikido's international growth, a growth that even the Doshu finds remarkable."

Furuya pauses a moment, reflecting on that statement. "Aikido acquaints us with a—well, for want of a better word—a "softer" side of ourselves that is often lacking in this modern world. Man has controlled the physical environment, human beings have taken astonishing technological leaps forward. But that hasn't changed human spirit, human psychology, human needs. If anything, the increased technological nature of society—in the West and in Japan—has caused a deepening erosion of the human spirit.

While technology has arguably improved our modern lifestyles, it has led to spiritual materialism. Moreover, we're now surrounded by artificial things and substances. We are no longer in touch with natural objects, with their softness and tactile surfaces.

"When I completed the dojo, for example, I had a startling insight: No one knew how to walk on wood floors anymore! People have become so used to walking on hard, artificial surfaces that walking on a wood floor was a revelation! It was flexible, it yielded to their weight, it made noise! Learning to walk on a

wood floor again suddenly focused the students' attention on their bodies and their surroundings.

"Spiritual materialism also leads to an 'I want this' or 'I want that' consciousness, an ego-centered mentality that is consumed with possessing objects. We're out of touch with our bodies and our minds—aikido is a disciplined program to reunite them, to liberate us from possession, from spiritual materialism, and to make us free, spontaneous natural beings.

"Once, of course, there was a great gulf between Eastern thought and Western thought. The Western approach has always been materialistic in the main. Take medicine: in Western medicine the physician sees the body as a machine; he diagnoses and treats the injured part without regard to the total overall structure. Eastern medicine—I'm interested in Tibetan medicine at the moment—never had that view. An organism was a microcosm of the universe. Treatment involved the total organism, not just an ailing part. The Western approach leans to the mechanistic and differential; the Eastern viewpoint has always been integral—the part can never be viewed separately from the whole."

Furuya reflects a moment. "The technological nature of the 20th century has destroyed much of that cultural separation. The nature of spiritual materialism, and the refuge in technological solutions and advances, is as commonplace, if not more so, in Japan as in America. Aikido, martial art, is a way back to a spiritual wholeness—a wholeness of mind and body."

* * *

As the late afternoon shadows fill the Aikido Institute of Los Angeles, Furuya gives a short laugh. "Fifteen years ago, when I was ready to return to America from Japan, Doshu told me he wanted me to teach aikido in Los Angeles, and that he wanted me to build a real dojo.

"Now, after 15 years, I have finally done it. I do hope one day he will visit and see that I have followed his request." Furuya gives another short laugh. "Perhaps you could say now that I'm semi-retired. This school is a fulfillment of my teacher's request, and it is a gift to my students. I hope that one day it will be self-sustaining under their direction.

"As for myself, I would like to acquire land in the country and try my hand at farming. There are many new approaches to farming today that do not rely on technological means of instant growth, wonder fertilizers and "improved" scientific strains. Indeed, Fukuoka, in his *One Straw Revolution*, has demonstrated a very ancient and traditional way of raising rice crops with tremendous yield. He maintains that a farmer's day shouldn't be consumed with farming, that he should have time for contemplation and relaxation.

"Farming. I would like to try my hand at that in the country—and spend my days practicing aikido, farming, and devoting myself to my Zen studies."

